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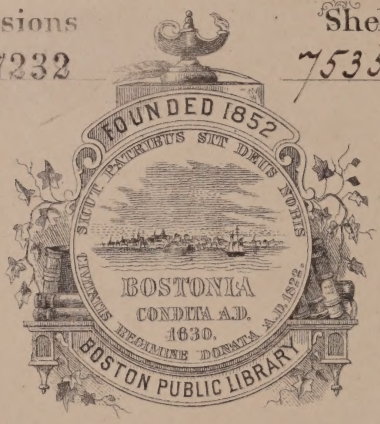

Received MAY 6 1891

J. Edwin Hodder

132

REV. MR. BRIGHAM'S SERMON,

BEFORE THE

Palestine Missionary Society,

1854.

FAITH THE GRAND MOTIVE POWER IN THE WORLD'S CONVERSION.

A

SERMON,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

PALESTINE MISSIONARY SOCIETY,

AT THEIR

THIRTY-FIRST ANNUAL MEETING,

AT NORTH WEYMOUTH, MASS., JUNE 13, 1854.

BY DAVID BRIGHAM,
Pastor of the Trinitarian Congregational Church in Bridgewater.

BOSTON:
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1854.

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MAY 6 1891

SERMON.

1 JOHN v. 4.

THIS IS THE VICTORY THAT OVERCOMETH THE WORLD, EVEN OUR FAITH.

THE life of the Christian, is a life of conflict. The Church of Christ, here on earth, is a church militant. The individual Christian, in working out his own salvation, and the Church, or collective body of Christians in this world, in laboring for the salvation of our fallen race, have essentially the same enemies to contend with,—"the world, the flesh, and the devil." The final and complete victory, in both cases, is certain,—made so by the promise and oath of God, who cannot lie. The strife may be long and hard, but both the Christian and the Church will sing the song of triumph.

"Be of good cheer," said Christ to his believing disciples, "I have overcome the world." Of this verse Luther said, "It is worthy to be carried from Rome to Jerusalem upon one's knees." It makes the world a vanquished enemy. It makes Satan an humbled foe. All that Christians have to do is, to *believe* in the great Captain of their salvation, "*fight the good fight of faith*," and the victory is theirs.

"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us."

Christians will themselves receive the end—the glorious consummation—of their faith, even the salvation of their souls. And the Church will achieve victories over the god of this world until "the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him."

"And this is the victory"—the *motive power* giving us the victory—"over the world, even our faith." The faith here spoken of is not a mere intellectual conviction of the truth of God. It is something better than the faith of devils. This may make its subjects tremble; but it will give them no victories either over sin in themselves, or over sinners of our world. It is "*with the heart*" that "man believeth unto righteousness"—so believes as to become one with Christ—one in labors, in self-denials, in sufferings, in rejoicings and triumphs.

Such is the faith referred to in the text as having power to overcome the world. It is "faith which worketh by love," which is vitalized, made operative by love to God, and love to man for God's sake. It is holy, affectionate trust in the testimony of God; especially in the record which he has given of his Son as "the way, the truth, and the life" for an alienated, lost world. It is the mind perceiving, and the heart taking hold of, the entire testimony of Jesus, bearing upon man's lost condition as a sinner,

and upon Heaven's plan for his recovery to holiness and to life eternal.

My proposition, having made these introductory observations, is,—*The Church, laboring in faith for the conversion of the world to Christ, will be successful.*

This world, alienated from God, steeped in sin, is not to be recovered to purity and to the favor of Heaven, by human science or philosophy; not by any recuperative power in itself; not by miracle; but by the preaching of the gospel accompanied and made effectual by the power of the Holy Spirit.

"After that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach *Christ crucified*, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God; because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

It is by the Church, through her ministry, that the gospel is to be published. She is "the angel" to "fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth; to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." Believing in Christ, the Church will do this work; and the world will be, in Christ, reconciled to God. "And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

Something of the efficacy of faith, as a motive power in the Church for the conversion of the world to God, may be seen from the following considerations.

1. *Faith gives to the great truths of Christianity their appropriate influence upon the heart, and, through the heart, upon the intellect and the outward life.*

Under the influence of faith in the divine testimony, we feel that God's revelations of spiritual truths, of things unseen and eternal, are fearful, glorious *realities*. We have, in our faith, a *confidence*, a *proof* of the verity of these things; for faith is, to those who have it, "the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen." Under the influence of faith, Christians feel as much certainty respecting the things of which God testifies, pertaining to his spiritual and eternal kingdom, as they do of the objects of time and sense.

"No man hath *seen* God at any time;" but faith doubts not that "he *is*, and that he is a *rewarder* of them that diligently seek him." The Christian does not *see* Christ; but *believing*, he confides in him, as the only and all-sufficient Saviour, just as if he *did* see him mediating between God and man, reconciling the world to God by the shedding of his blood, and the working of his Spirit.

The Christian does not see the human soul; he does not see the redeemed in heaven, nor the lost in hell. But, believing in God, he feels that man has a soul; that this soul will live forever in heaven or in hell, according as it is, or is not "washed,

and sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

Faith gives as much certainty to these things as if they were seen. Hence their mighty influence over the man, stirring the depths of the soul, and moving it to plan and act for the salvation of the world.

Acted upon only by motives earthly and sensual, men will feel, and plan, and act, for the world and the things of the world only. Place them in the presence of God, at the throne of judgment, in the midst of the scenes of eternal retribution, and, with right hearts, they will sympathize with God and with God's revealed truth; and god-like purposes will be formed, and, as far as possible, will be executed for the salvation of a world lying in wickedness.

With the eye of faith the Christian does see God, and heaven, and hell. With the ear of faith he hears the wailings of the lost and the songs of the redeemed. And with the heart of faith he feels for the lost, as lost with them; for the redeemed, as rejoicing with them before the eternal throne.

With such feelings the Christian, while he lives in the world, will live above the world. He will not subordinate his religion to his worldly interests, but he will regard all earthly things as valuable only as they can be used, and are used, to promote the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom.

Baptized with faith's renewing fire, how would the Church "look forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners!" How would she go forth, amidst the

millions of mankind in arms against the God of truth and of love, "conquering and to conquer!"

2. *Faith enlarges the heart, so that it takes into its embrace the whole moral universe.* The believer identifies God, and angels, and mankind, with himself; their interests with his own. As he looks at God he says, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." As he contemplates angels and men he exclaims, "What is our joy and crown? are not ye in the day of Jesus Christ?"

As full, heart-felt conviction of the truth of the divine testimony respecting the guilty, ruined condition of man without a Saviour, respecting God's plan for the recovery of man to holiness and happiness eternal, and respecting the deep interest which not only man, but angels and God have in the complete accomplishment of this plan; as conviction of these great truths rests upon the believing mind, so does the heart of the believer sympathize with God in his wonderful work of "redeeming love." The salvation of a dying world; the joy of angels over repenting sinners; the glory of God in Christ; in the church triumphant, saved by the blood of atonement;—all these glorious results of a preached gospel, the believer looks upon as his own interests, as a part of his own great salvation.

Now let the heart of the Church be thus enlarged by a living faith to sympathize with God and with his moral kingdom; and, with a world to be redeemed and saved by its instrumentality spread out before it; with a God enthroned in its affections, to be glorified in the fulfillment of his eternal purposes

of mercy through Jesus Christ; with the feeling deep in the soul of each and all of its members, that their own blessedness in the presence of God must consist in *seeing* his gracious plan of redemption consummated, and heaven filled with rejoicing spirits "washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb;"—with motives such as these, bearing upon the heart of the Church, *can* she purpose feebly, or act inefficiently for the conversion of the world to Christ? If moral efforts correspond with the motives prompting them, if moral results are proportionate to the causes producing them, then will the Church of Christ, permeated by a living faith, attempt and perform exploits for the extension and universal prevalence of the Redeemer's kingdom in our world.

3. *Faith is essentially a principle of self-denial, of self-sacrifice.* Such a spirit is essential to all effective efforts for the world's regeneration. Such is the spirit of faith. We must not forget that faith is made a living, operative principle, by love; and "love seeketh not her own." The benevolent faith of the gospel has its very life in devoting self for the good of others; in offering self as a "living sacrifice" for the glory of God and the best good of mankind. Now no great and good enterprise can be successfully carried on without self-denial. This is especially true in reference to the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom in our world.

The spirit of the world is in direct antagonism to the spirit of the gospel. Not only is the heart of man naturally and wholly alienated from God and holiness, but the principles of intercourse between

man and man, the maxims and customs of the world, its institutions and laws, both civil and religious, are, to a great extent, in direct conflict with the teachings of Christ.

This is true of heathen, Mohammedan, and papal nations. Nor of them only is it true. In countries boasting of a pure Christianity,—a free, Protestant Christianity,—in our own beloved country, are laws, and customs, and institutions, as repugnant to the gospel as darkness is to light, as hell is to heaven. The gospel must move onward through the world in opposition to the dominant feelings, against the controlling influences and interests of worldly men. It must subdue these feelings of hostility, overcome these counteracting influences, and mould human laws and institutions after its own pattern, before its spirit can be diffused, and its blessings fully experienced throughout all the nations of the earth. In this conflict, ease must be sacrificed for labor and toil. Property must be given up not only to the extent of convenience, but, it may be, even all our living. Domestic and social ties must often be sundered. Obloquy, and reproach, and persecution even unto death, must be endured. In the work of reconciling the world to God through Christ, the very nature of the enterprise, the whole tenor of the Sacred Oracles, and the entire history of the Church, teach us that self-denial is an essential element of success.

Moses could not have been the successful leader of God's chosen tribes from the house of bondage to the land of promise, but for his possession of that self-sacrificing faith, under the influence of

which he chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt."

Paul had utterly failed to triumph, as he did, in his aggressive movements against the kingdom of darkness, in his efforts to win souls to Christ, but for the constraining power of faith under which he acted. This made him willing to "become all things to all men;" led him to say, (though "bonds and afflictions" were before him,) "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

So with the Church of Christ; she will act effectively in her efforts to publish the gospel, to subdue the world into willing subjection to her Lord and Master, only as she has the spirit of self-denial; only as she rejoices to take up the cross and follow Christ in his self-sacrifice for the glory of the Father, and the life of a dying world. Faith, uniting the Church to Christ as the branch is united to the vine, as the members are united to the head of the body, imparts to her this spirit of self-sacrifice. And with this spirit, feeling as she does the power of revealed truth, sympathizing as she does with God in the work of redemption, she must "run not as uncertainly;" she must "fight not as one that beateth the air."

4. *Moved by faith, the Church will persevere in her efforts for the conversion of the world to Christ.* And *perseverance* is a grand element of success in

every good enterprise. What good work has ever been accomplished without it? And what object, within the limit of human power to accomplish, may not be gained by a persevering use of the appropriate means?

Unyielding efforts to compass one desired object, gave to Wilberforce, to Harlan Page, and to Mary Lyon, their great power and wonderful success in their respective spheres of labor.

Would we succeed in our efforts to accumulate property, to acquire useful knowledge, to remove evils political or moral from the community, to enlighten the ignorant, to purify the polluted, to break the arm of the oppressor and let the oppressed go free, we must ply the appropriate means steadily, perseveringly. Do this and success is sure. So let the Church put forth her efforts perseveringly, in the use of God's appointed means for the conversion of the world to Christ, and she will not labor in vain. Let her not only wake up to this work, but *keep* awake; let her not only begin to labor with her might for the coming of Christ's kingdom, but "*continue* therein with *all perseverance*," and success will crown her efforts.

Faith in the testimony of God will constrain the Church to labor, and not faint, in the service of Christ. Confidence of success, in any good enterprise upon which the heart is set, urges onward through toils, discouragements, dangers, and self-denials, those engaged in it, until the object is gained. Let the Church be strong in faith, taking hold of God's promises, as all yea and amen in Christ Jesus, and she will not doubt of success in

her efforts to bring all men into subjection to the gospel. She may, indeed, feel her own weakness, but she will feel also that she is strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Animated by assurance of faith in the divine promises, she will not put her hand to the plough and look back; she will work while it is day, and so much the more if the enemy comes in like a flood, knowing that the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him; that the triumphing of the wicked is short; that Jesus reigns, and will reign, until all enemies shall be put under his feet. In due time the Church will reap the glorious harvest, if she faint not. Again,

5. *Self-approval accompanies the efforts and sacrifices made for the conversion of the world to Christ.* This gives energy and effectiveness to her movements. Man is so constituted that he cannot avoid both reflection and anticipation. Honest, conscientious men, are disposed frequently to look back upon their past course of life, to recall what they have done, and to examine the motives by which they have been governed. They are disposed to look forward, also, and to scrutinize their motives and whole course of conduct in the light of a dying hour; amidst the solemnities of the last great day, and of the dread realities of the coming world of retribution.

If, as they thus search themselves in the light of the past and the future, they find reason and conscience approving their course; if, in this self-approval, they have the assurance of the divine

approbation, then they press forward cheerfully, with renewed energy and perseverance.

Such self-approval, such "confidence toward God," they have who are laboring with their might, and with godly sincerity, to extend the reign of truth and righteousness through the world. Faith, energized by supreme love to God, and fervent love to mankind, whom "he hath purchased with his own blood," in the person of his beloved Son, may prompt to abundant labors, to much personal sacrifice of ease, of social enjoyments, of property, and of health. It may prompt to the willing endurance of reproach and poverty; of perils in the sea, in the wilderness, and among the heathen. It may prompt to a readiness, not only to suffer the loss of all earthly things, but also to die, if need be, for the name of the Lord Jesus; for the spread and triumph of his great salvation in the world.

But of these labors and sacrifices, for such an end as the glory of divine justice and grace, in the salvation of immortal souls from sin and death eternal, and their reception, being made perfect in holiness, to heaven's everlasting joys; of these labors and sacrifices, however great, for such an object, both reason and conscience, enlightened by the divine word, most fully approve. This self-approval gives to the Christian, in all his efforts and sacrifices, a sweet and cheering assurance that God is with him, that Heaven smiles upon the works of his hands.

Can Christians feel too deeply; can they pray too earnestly; can they give too liberally; can they

labor too abundantly for the reconciliation of the world to God?

Did the Son of God feel too intensely? Did he do and suffer too much for the salvation of a guilty, perishing world? Does he not rejoice, and will he not rejoice evermore, in the approving testimony of his reason and conscience, and in the love of the Father, for the sacrifice which he made of himself on the cross? This was, indeed, a limitless sacrifice for the Son of God to make, an "unspeakable gift" for the Father to bestow; but infinite reason justifies, conscience divine approves, and the heart of everlasting love rejoices in the sacrifice.

The Church of Christ, in her most fervent desires, in her severest toils, in her most costly sacrifices, for the spread of the gospel, for the universal prevalence of "pure and undefiled religion," need fear no reproofs from enlightened reason, no rebukes from a good conscience, no frowns from "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." No; let the Church do her utmost, and let her suffer all that her thus doing demands, and reason, and conscience, and God, will utter only the voice of approval; giving assurance that the cause in which she is engaged, is the cause of truth and righteousness, the cause of humanity and of heaven; and is worth all, and more than all, that the friends of God and of man can do and suffer in its behalf.

Thus encouraged by self-approval and confidence in the favor of Heaven, the Church, with her heart fixed on eternal things, with holy love to God and man burning in her bosom, will press forward in her work; in her conflicts with sin and Satan; and

God, even her own God, will give her the victory. "The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein forever."

6. The last consideration I shall offer in proof that the Church of Christ, laboring in faith, will conquer the world for him, is this:—*Faith will constrain to "fervent, effectual prayer."* The dutiful child, leaning with affectionate confidence upon his earthly parent, as able and willing to help him in time of need, naturally seeks his aid. This child will be importunate just in proportion as he feels his own needs, and has confidence in his parent that he can and will afford the assistance sought.

Just so the Christian, the child of God, having faith in him, as able and willing to hear and answer the petitions of his people, will feel constrained to "pray, always, with all prayer and supplication, in the Spirit," for needed help, and to "watch thereunto with all perseverance."

In the conversion of the world to Christ, Christians must feel the need of God's help. They are laboring to turn men from sin to holiness; to give life to men dead in sin; twice dead from the power of evil habits, superinduced by the long-continued choice of sin. They are laboring to save men, who not only have hearts "fully set in them to do evil," but who are beset on all sides with temptations from earth and hell to cleave to the ways of death. Christians must feel that, in this work, their own strength is weakness; that all their "sufficiency is of God." And feeling this, faith will bring them to the throne of grace. They will take hold on God. They will plead his "eternal purpose and

grace in Christ Jesus." They will plead his covenant engagements with his well-beloved Son. They will plead his exceeding great and precious promises to his believing people. They will plead the glory of his great and holy name.

With humility, yet with boldness; with submission, yet with importunity; with a spirit renouncing all claim on God, and yet refusing to let him go without a blessing, will believers wrestle in prayer. They will prevail. "Thus saith the Lord, ye shall call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." Here is God's promise. And what though the Christian be all weakness in himself, yet by prayer he girds himself with the strength of the Almighty. Prayer moves the heart and the hand of Him that moves the world.

To the Church of Christ, laboring in faith and in prayer, God saith, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Faith realizes the great truths of Christianity, and thus gives them their full and

appropriate influence upon the heart and life. It enlarges the heart to sympathize with the moral universe, to make the interests of mankind, of angels, and of God, its own interests. Faith is a spirit of self-denial, finding its own good in doing good to others. It is a spirit of perseverance. It carries with it, in all its toils and sacrifices for Christ and his cause, the approval of reason, of conscience and of God; and it constrains to fervent, effectual prayer.

In drawing to a close, permit me to repeat the question propounded to this Society three years ago: "*What is wanting for the speedy evangelization of the world?*" It is not that God would open a field for missionary enterprise. The world is already an open field. It is not that God would furnish means for publishing the glad tidings of salvation. There are men enough in the visible Church, did they possess the spirit of Christ, speedily to preach the gospel to every creature. And the Church has wealth enough to educate and support the needed company of missionaries, and to furnish all needed missionary appliances, for the speedy conversion of the world. Look at the splendid church edifices, the costly educational structures, the princely dwellings, with their expensive appurtenances of taste and luxury, in our own bounds and elsewhere, and talk not of pecuniary inability to meet all needed expenditures in the missionary enterprise. What the Church, as a body, has yet given of her silver and gold to extend the Redeemer's kingdom on the earth, is but a mere pittance of what she is able to give. God has,

indeed, enlarged the hearts of some to give liberally; to give even to self-denial. We bless God that it is so. But such contributors are, as yet, "like angel visits, few and far between."

What is wanting, then, for the speedy evangelization of the world, is a power acting in the Church to bring out her abundant resources for the accomplishment of this object. Such a power is found in faith.

Let the Church of Christ, in all her branches, and in all their members, be "full of the Holy Ghost and of faith," and there would be no want of resources, either of men or of money, and no want of opportunity for the speedy bringing in of the millennial glory of Zion. The Church, laboring and praying in faith, would soon hear a voice from her ascended Head, her reigning King, saying, "Be it unto thee according to thy faith."

Soon would be heard the shout of triumph:

> "One song employs all nations; and all cry,
> 'Worthy the Lamb, for he was slain for us!'
> Behold the measure of the promise filled;
> See Salem built, the labor of a God!
> Praise is in all her gates; upon her walls,
> And in her streets, and in her spacious courts,
> Is heard, Salvation!"

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus." AMEN.

THIRTY-FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING

OF THE

PALESTINE MISSIONARY SOCIETY.

The Thirty-fourth Annual Meeting of the PALESTINE MISSIONARY SOCIETY, was held at the meeting-house of the First Parish, Weymouth, June 14, 1854.

The public religious exercises commenced at 3 o'clock, P. M. A sermon was preached by Rev. David Brigham; and Rev. Mr. Ford and Rev. Mr. Worcester, being present as a deputation from the Parent Society, addressed the meeting. The Report of the Treasurer was presented, and accepted.

Voted, That a copy of the Sermon preached by Rev. Mr. Brigham be requested for publication.

Voted, That the thanks of the Society be presented to the deputation from the Board, for their attendance and aid.

Officers for the Current Year.

Gen. BENJAMIN KING, *President.*

Dea. JONATHAN NEWCOMB, } *Vice Presidents.*
Mr. JOSIAH W. KINGMAN, }

Rev. JONAS PERKINS, *Secretary.*

EBENEZER ALDEN, M. D., *Treasurer.*

SILAS PAINE, Esq., *Auditor.*

The next Annual Meeting will be held at the Meeting-house of the Union Society, (Rev. Mr. Harding's,) South Weymouth, on the third Wednesday of June, A. D. 1855, at 10 o'clock, A. M., for the transaction of business; and at 11 o'clock, for public service. Sermon, by Rev. C. M. Cordley.

RECEIPTS.

Abington, First Parish, Gent. 66; La. 34,50; . . .	$100 50
" South " S. Blake, Jr.	20 00
" East " H. Torrey 100; Gent. and La. 40;	140 00
Braintree, First Parish, La. 42,91; m. c. 90; . . .	132 91
" South " Juv. Miss. So. 5; m. c. 32; . .	37 00
" and *Weymouth* Un. So. m. c. 59,01; E. B. 1; coll. 27,20;	87 21
Bridgewater, Trin. So. m. c.	83 00
" Scotland Parish, coll. 11,47; Rev. J. O. F. 2;	13 47
Cohasset, Evan. So. coll. 100; s. s. 2,63;	102 63
East Bridgewater, Trin. So. (Rev. Mr. Sanford's) coll. .	24 50
North Bridgewater, First Parish, coll. pt.	46 14
" " Porter Evan. So. m. c. 169,45; Gent. and La. 230,55;	400 00
Quincy, Evan. So. (Rev. Mr. Clarke's) m. c. . . .	20 00
Randolph, First Par. Gent. 113,58; La. 50,54; m. c. 61,86;	225 98
" East " Gent. 43,15; La. 45,96; Yo. La. 15; m. c. 27,89;	132 00
Scituate, Cong. Ch. and So.	16 67
Weymouth, North Parish, Gent. and La. 96,69; m. c. 9,06;	105 75
" South " (Rev. Mr. Terry's) coll. 30; m. c. 40,70; indiv. 1;	71 70
" " Union, (Rev. Mr. Harding's) m. c. . .	76 78
Legacy, E. Cobb, Abington, First Parish, ...	175 00
	$2,011 24

Attest, E. ALDEN, TREASURER.

(Feb., 1891, 20,000)

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